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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001386

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DS, EB/TRA AND EUR/SE
ROME FOR FAA
PARIS FOR TSA
DHS FOR TSA

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PTER](#) [FAIR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: Civair Safety/Security Update

Ref: (A) Ankara 979 (B) Ankara 262

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action cable. Please see para 10.

Summary:

[1](#)2. (SBU) In March 5 discussions on air safety and security issues, GOT officials told us that transport and security officials had not yet taken a policy decision on Department of Homeland Security's (DHS') emergency amendments on posting armed law enforcement officers (LEOs) on planes. A Turkish National Police official told us that, notwithstanding the lack of a specialized training program and other preparations, the GOT would post an armed LEO if the alternative was flight cancellation. GOT officials also explained that physical renovations at the Istanbul Ataturk Airport were the reason for a delay in returning to border and customs checks at the first airport of entry in Turkey. There appears to be no change in the status of air safety-related legislation. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Econoff and Econ Specialist discussed air safety and security issues on March 5 with: Haydar Yalcin, Department Head in the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Turgay Sahan, Airport Division Head at the Security General Directorate of the Turkish National Police (TNP), Erdal Kaynak, TNP Protection Department, Ayten Eler, of the MFA Aviation Department, and Osman Tural and Ali Ariduru, advisors to the Minister of Transport and Communications.

DHS Aviation Emergency Amendments

[1](#)3. (SBU) Sahan recently told us that the National Civil Aviation Security Council discussed the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS') amendments on posting armed law enforcement officers (LEOs) on planes. NCASC directed GOT agencies and the airlines to commence studies and make other preparations (ref A). In our March 4 discussion, he elaborated and qualified this readout, noting that, while studies were ongoing, a policy decision on whether to post LEOs in fact had not been taken. The GOT is waiting for the results of a May meeting of the European Civil Aviation Commission (ECAC) at which this issue will be discussed. In response to Econoff's question as to what the GOT would do if TSA offered the choice of canceling a flight or posting a Turkish LEO, Sahan said the GOT would not cancel the flight.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In a conversation with Transport Ministry advisors later that day, Econoff relayed Sahan's comments on this issue. Osman Tural opined that, if such a situation arose, the GOT would cancel the flight.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Comment: In an earlier meeting (ref B), TNP had also said that GOT agencies were studying the issue, but that, in an emergency, an LEO with aviation experience could be called on to perform this duty. However, this officer would not have received specialized air marshal training. End Comment.

Plans to Fix Gap in Immigration/Customs Control

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16. (SBU) As reported ref A, the GOT decided at the February meeting to take steps to return to a system requiring passengers to clear customs and border control at the initial point of entry to Turkey, but the change will not be implemented for several months. TNP told us that the reason for the delay is that Istanbul Ataturk Airport must be renovated in order to enable passengers to claim and recheck their luggage. Embassy will press the GOT to accelerate implementation.

Air Safety

17. (U) Econoff outlined FAA concerns about deficiencies in air safety oversight and DGCA difficulties in retaining experienced staff, and asked GOT interlocutors about the status of draft legislation intended to address these concerns. We also noted that FAA was prepared to participate in operations and airworthiness training in June and July.

18. (SBU) Yalcin responded that he was looking forward to the FAA training, but that problems retaining experienced staff were ongoing and had compelled DGCA to postpone the training until this summer. Yalcin, who is responsible for flight standards, said he could not comment on the draft legislation because he had not seen it. The Transport Minister's advisors appeared to be unfamiliar with these issues and said they would look into them. However, they registered some unease on the issue of DGCA autonomy, claiming that air safety oversight organizations in a number of European countries were not autonomous. Econoff responded that FAA sought to ensure Turkish compliance with ICAO standards in this area.

19. (SBU) TNP officials told us privately that DGCA staff were not focused on security issues, and had left much of the work in this area to TNP. The same officials, alluding to the difficulty of working with DGCA in this area, told us that they had formally suggested that airport security responsibilities be transferred from TNP at the February National Civil Aviation Security Council (NCASC) meeting. The suggestion was not accepted.

110. (SBU) Action Request for DHS/TSA Paris: Embassy requests a response to ref B relaying TNP's request for background information on the organization and financing of the U.S. sky marshal program, and encouraging DHS/TSA to consider training possibilities for the GOT in this area. Given that the GOT is apparently inclined to put LEOs who have not been trained as air marshals on flights, we request that TSA consider this request on a priority basis and consider whether, in the absence of this training, it should offer the Turks the option of putting an armed LEO on flights destined for the United States.
Edelman